Before the FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSIONEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION OFFICE OF SECRETARY OF D. C. 20554 OFFICE OF SECRETARY

In the	Matter of)	CC	Docket	No.	92-77
	Party Preference InterLATA Calls)				
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DOCKET FILE COPY ORIGINAL

REPLY

BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc. ("BellSouth") herewith submits its reply comments in the above-entitled proceeding. The interest and concern generated by this docket has been overwhelming, with nearly 200 participants submitting initial comments on August 1, 1994. Of these, the vast majority oppose implementation of billed party preference (BPP). Opposition to BPP is found among large and small LECs, large and small IXCs, operator service providers (OSPs), competitive access providers, call aggregators and state commissions. Notwithstanding the diversity of interests represented, these parties are unanimous in their conclusion that the promised benefits of BPP are overstated and will in no way compensate for the vast expenditure of capital and other resources necessary to the implementation of BPP technology. Given such a record, the Commission cannot reasonably order the implementation of BPP at this time nor commit the billions of dollars and other industry resources which would be required for such an effort.

1. The costs to implement BPP are staggering.

The Commission has estimated LEC start-up costs for BPP

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to be approximately \$1.1 Billion, based upon earlier projections.¹ This figure (by no means insubstantial) has now increased to \$1.3 Billion in LEC capital outlay and nonrecurring expense.² Likewise, the FNPRM estimates a further \$120 Million in operator service provider costs for BPP implementation; however, this projection too appears conservative since it is based upon AT&T expenditures of \$68 Million and includes cost data from only the three largest IXCs.³

The FNPRM projection of annual LEC recurring expenses is also understated. In contrast to the Commission's estimate of \$60 Million for the entire LEC industry,⁴ data compiled by BellSouth suggests that this company alone will incur annual recurring expenses of \$29 Million for BPP implementation.⁵ This is commensurate with estimates from Ameritech (\$35 Million),⁶ NYNEX (\$23.1 Million),⁷ SNET (\$11-

In the Matter of Billed Party Preference for 0+ InterLATA Calls, CC Docket No. 92-77, <u>Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking</u>, 9 FCC Rcd 3320 (1994), para. 20 (hereinafter "FNPRM").

The new estimate is obtained by summing projections submitted by the RBOCs, GTE, Sprint, USTA, CBT and SNET in initial comments.

³ Current AT&T projections are \$80-\$100 Million in BPP start-up costs. AT&T, p. 21.

FNPRM, para. 20.

⁵ BellSouth, p. 15.

⁶ Ameritech, p. 10.

NYNEX, Attachment C.

\$14 Million), and GTE (\$52.3-\$52.6 Million). Even if the more conservative projections of Bell Atlantic (\$9 Million) and SWBT (\$15.3-\$16.5 Million) are used to formulate an estimate of total LEC recurring costs, it is apparent that the resulting figure will vastly exceed the \$60 Million posited in the FNPRM.

Finally, as many commenters have observed, the FNPRM makes no allowance for other elements of cost, such as LEC overheads, nor for other service features which—if implemented—could significantly add to the total cost of BPP deployment. The latter include 14-digit screening of line number based cards and the capability of processing commercial credit cards. All of these matters undermine the FNPRM estimate of implementation costs and compel its rejection as a tool for evaluating the merits of BPP technology.

2. The FNPRM overstates the benefits attributable to BPP.

The FNPRM assigns a value of \$620 Million annually to the adoption of BPP, to be realized through customer migration from higher priced OSPs and the elimination of commission payments to aggregators. BellSouth and other

⁸ SNET, pp. 5-7 and n. 21.

⁹ GTE, p. 9.

Bell Atlantic, p. 12.

SWBT, p. 6; App. A and B.

commenters have demonstrated the fallacy of these assumptions. The availability of access code dialing permits free carrier selection from virtually any telephone—a circumstance which exerts downward pressure on the rates of higher priced OSPs. 12 Indeed, the range of rates between the three largest IXCs and third—tier providers has continued to narrow, rendering the Commission's use of a \$0.19 differential suspect. 13 Finally, as AT&T points out, it is highly improbable that any rate differential would persist unchanged over a period of years, notwithstanding massive loss of market share by the higher priced OSPs. 14

Equally vulnerable is the Commission's projection of a \$340 Million benefit through the elimination of interLATA 0+ commissions. Many members of the independent pay telephone

AT&T has documented pervasive consumer knowledge of access codes such as 1-800-OPERATOR, 1-800-CALL-ATT and 1-800-COLLECT and states that use of the 1-800-CALL-ATT number has increased by 10% each month since its introduction earlier this year. AT&T, p. 8. These findings are consistent with results from an August 1994 BellSouth survey, which show that 70.9% of business customers and 68.6% of residence customers are familiar with the 1-800-CALL-ATT dialing convention. Similar results were obtained for 1-800-COLLECT, with 72.8% of business respondents and 64.2% of residence indicating recognition of the service. A total of 684 customers participated in the survey out of 2,042 randomly selected business and residence subscribers who were contacted by BellSouth.

Since initial comments were filed in this proceeding, AT&T has again requested authorization to raise rates on domestic calling card calls. AT&T Seeks Rise in Some Rates, Wall St. J., Aug. 30, 1994 at B5.

 $^{^{14}}$ AT&T, p. 6.

industry assert that loss of this revenue stream will ultimately reduce the availability and diversity of payphone services. 15 This assessment is made more compelling by the lack of any evidence as to what would constitute a reasonable level of compensation to payphone providers in the absence of commission revenue. 16 Aggregators too have expressed alarm at the prospective loss of commission payments, which are used to support an array of institutional operations and services. 17 If BPP is implemented, these parties must inevitably seek alternative revenue sources or curtail programs and services now subsidized through interLATA 0+ commissions. The pecuniary and social cost of these modifications, while impossible to quantify, cannot be ignored in any assessment of the merits of implementing BPP.

3. Less costly and more direct measures are available to achieve the Commission's competitive goals.

As the record of this proceeding overwhelmingly demonstrates, customer autonomy in IXC selection is already an accomplished fact. The proliferation of access code dialing arrangements and Commission measures to insure

¹⁵ APCC, pp. 15-21; CMS, p. 3; FPTA, p.3.

APCC in its comments maintains that a payment of \$12 per phone per month as proposed by the FNPRM would not be sufficiently compensatory. APCC, p. 15.

See, e.g., Comments of ACI-NA; ACE and NACUBO; City of Austin Texas.

compliance with TOCSIA requirements have generally eliminated the abuses BPP was intended to address. To the extent a need remains to correct the market behavior of some OSPs and foster greater competition in the operator services industry, these goals are achievable through more direct and less costly means than the global alternative of BPP.

Numerous parties advance proposals for Commission regulation of OSP rates through rate caps or benchmarking. This approach provides a viable means for directly addressing the problem of excessive OSP prices with none of the dislocations and massive expenditure required to deploy BPP. As such, it merits further study by the Commission.

To lessen the effects of AT&T's massive embedded subscriber base and encourage a more competitive payphone services market; BellSouth reiterates its support of the 0+ Public Domain concept, which would require all calling card issuers to make validation data generally available on reasonable and nondiscriminatory terms. As BellSouth has frequently pointed out, this approach constitutes sound jurisprudence as well as good public policy and should be adopted by the Commission. 18

Lastly, competition continues to spur the development of many new products and services which provide alternative call routing and/or which supplant altogether traditional

BellSouth is not alone in its support of 0+ Public Domain. See Comments of LDDS, p. 11; Pacific Bell, p. 9, ONCOR, p. 19.

wireline technology. Some of these offerings are described in BellSouth's initial comments. Further innovation can best be encouraged by allowing LECs, IXCs and OSPs the latitude to develop customized responses to market needs without the encumbrance of a pervasive BPP technology.

4. If BPP is adopted, all users of the public switched network must bear the costs of implementation.

As a general matter, recovery of costs from the cost causer represents both the most equitable and the most economically efficient pricing philosophy. Nevertheless, this approach cannot be applied to BPP, given the substantial costs of the service and the significant potential for IXC bypass. 19 If cost recovery is limited to BPP users, erosion of demand will ultimately create a service which is unaffordable to all and result in millions of dollars of stranded LEC investment. 20

A reasonable cost recovery mechanism is critical to the viability of any BPP offering. Hence, this issue cannot be deferred until implementation of the service is underway, as

AT&T itself acknowledges that it is not "clear that all of the major carriers would seek to take advantage of BPP by encouraging their customers to dial '0' and pay the additional costs of BPP." AT&T, p. 23 at n. 36.

Even LEC proponents of BPP are acutely aware of this potential. Thus Pacific Bell conditions its support on the guarantee of a mechanism for full cost recovery; while SWBT insists upon a prohibition of aggregator bypass and prompt Commission redress of any threat to BPP service demand. Pacific Bell, pp. 1-3; SWBT, pp. 12-13.

one commenter has suggested. For the Commission to order a capital outlay of the magnitude required by BPP without first providing an adequate method for LEC cost recovery would be a confiscatory action and legally unsustainable.

CONCLUSION

Representatives from all segments of the telecommunications industry have expressed vigorous opposition to the deployment of BPP. Their concerns are substantial and well founded. The stated goals of BPP technology have largely been achieved, while the costs (financial and otherwise) of implementing BPP remain, by any reasonable standard of measurement, enormous. To the extent abuses persist in the industry, the Commission has alternative means at its disposal to curb unreasonable pricing behavior and foster the development of a more competitive operator services market.

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DATE: September 14, 1994

²¹ Sprint, pp. 42-43.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that I have this 14th day of September, 1994 served all parties to this action with a copy of the foregoing REPLY by placing a true and correct copy of the same in the United States Mail, postage prepaid, addressed to the parties listed on the attached service list.

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